



### Decision Notice

Fresno Reservoir Wildlife Management Area Grazing Lease  
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks

Region 6  
54078 Hwy 2 West  
Glasgow, MT 59804  
406-228-3700

March 17, 2015

### **Proposed Action** (*Alternative B*)

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) proposed to extend the grazing lease for the Fresno Reservoir Wildlife Management Area (WMA) for six years until December 31, 2020. The proposed action would modify the existing grazing system to include adjacent private and leased lands. The new grazing system will reduce the average Animal Unit Months (AUMs) of grazing pressure on the WMA from the 300 AUMs under the current system to an average of 264 AUMs. There would be a maximum of 100 Animal Units (100 cow/calf pairs) permitted on the WMA. Pastures on the WMA would still be grazed in a three pasture rest-rotation grazing system, but these pastures would be provided additional periods of rest.

### **Alternatives to the Proposed Action**

#### Alternative A

Under the no action alternative, the grazing lease for Fresno Reservoir WMA would not be extended. There would be no livestock grazing on the Fresno Reservoir WMA in 2015. The absence of grazing would increase residual grass cover and vegetation heights, which would provide additional nesting cover for upland nesting birds, but would reduce the heterogeneity in vegetation heights preferred by other wildlife species. The long-term absence of grazing could result in an increase in fire fuels and wildfire risk. FWP would continue to manage the WMA to benefit wildlife and provide recreational opportunity.

#### Alternative C

The grazing lease on the property would be extended for an additional 6 years, but would be grazed under the past three pasture rest-rotation grazing system. The WMA would be grazed at a stocking rate of 300 AUMs from May 15<sup>th</sup>-September 15<sup>th</sup> by 75 Animal Units (75 cow/calf pairs). There would be no inclusion of adjacent private and leased lands in the grazing system. WMA pastures would experience increased grazing pressure and fewer periods of rest from grazing under this alternative.

## **Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) Process**

FWP prepared a draft environmental assessment (EA) pursuant to MEPA and is required to assess the potential impacts of the alternatives to the human and physical environment. FWP mailed 18 copies of the EA to surrounding landowners, Hill County commissioners, and local officials. Electronic notifications of the EA's availability were also made to other individuals, agencies, and interested parties. The EA was open for a 30 day public comment period that ran from February 4<sup>th</sup> to March 5<sup>th</sup>. The EA was also available for public review on the FWP website and at the Havre Area Resource office and the FWP Regional office in Glasgow.

A public hearing to provide information on proposal, answer questions, and take public comments was held on February 5th in Havre. The meeting was attended by 2 people. There were two public notices posted in the both the Great Falls Tribune and Havre Daily News informing the public of the draft environmental assessment and opportunity for comment.

## **Summary of Public Comment**

FWP received 3 individual comments during the comment period. All three of the comments received were in support of the proposed alternative.

Communications with the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) confirmed that BOR leases outside the WMA that were identified in the grazing system are 5-year term leases that are awarded through a limited bid process. If the leases on these parcels were awarded to another bidder the grazing system for the WMA would need to be modified.

## **Decision**

Based on the Environmental Assessment it has been determined that the proposed action will not have significant effects on the human and physical environment associated with this action. Therefore an environmental assessment (EA) is the appropriate level of analysis for this project.

After review of this proposal and the public comments submitted, it is my decision to accept the Decision Notice and Draft Environmental Assessment as final and proceed with Alternative B, the proposed action, allowing grazing on the Fresno Reservoir Wildlife Management Area until December 31, 2020.

The Record of Decision will be available for public viewing on the Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks website at: <http://fwp.mt.gov/news/publicNotices>. Copies may also be obtained from Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Havre Area Office, 2165 Hwy 2 East, Havre, MT 59501, (406) 265-6177.



Tom Flowers  
FWP Region 6 Supervisor